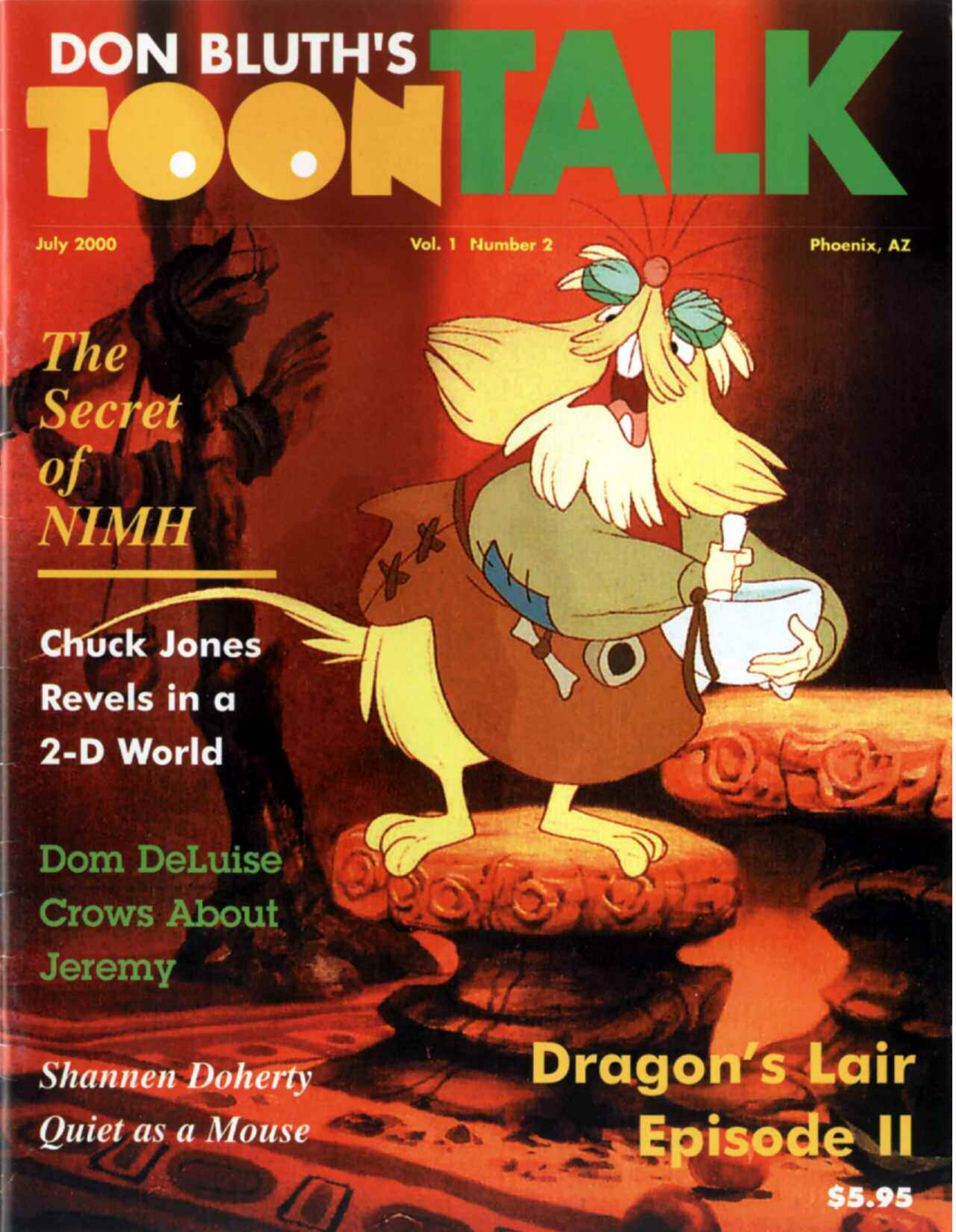
DON BLUTH'S TOON TALK

July 2000 Vol. 1 Number 2 Phoenix, AZ



The Secret of NIMH

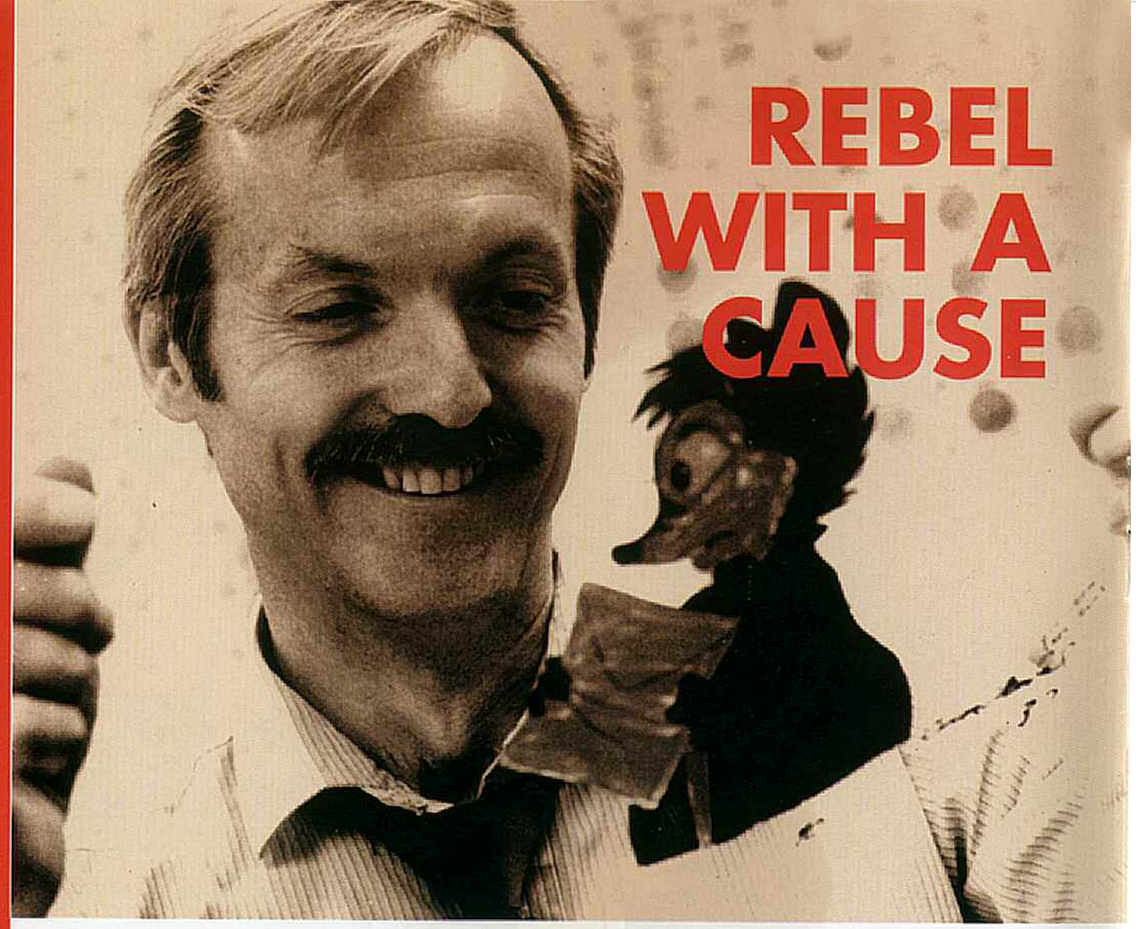
Chuck Jones Revels in a 2-D World

Dom DeLuise Crows About Jeremy

Shannen Doherty Quiet as a Mouse

Dragon's Lair Episode II

$5.95



REBEL WITH A CAUSE

On September 13, 1979, we did it. Seventeen of us resigned from the Disney Studio. We shared an ideal, and there was a certain stubbornness about our position that resisted all compromise. We left Disney because we felt somewhere along the line the corporation had dropped the ball. Animation was in a rut. Now, to the layman, a cartoon is a cartoon, and one is as good as another. And, certainly to a studio head, the only good cartoon is the one that makes money. But, there are a few of us diehards out here who view animation as an art form. Certainly, I could point to *Pinocchio, Bambi,* or many more as examples. In my mind, Disney animation had regrettably become a formulated process. The element of risk, so necessary to reach a high level of creativity, was waning. Corporations like it safe. This sense of loss was heightened by the fact that for four years, a group of us Disney employees had been making a short cartoon called *Banjo, The Woodpile Cat*. We worked evenings and weekends in my garage. This we were doing to rediscover the art of animation. We had sharpened our skills to such an extent, that the production crew then working on *The Fox and the Hound,* was not operating at full potential. And, the indifference about the sagging situation was rampant, add to that, the positive memories I had of working on *Sleeping Beauty* in 1955 when Walt himself, was in charge. He never compromised. Those recollections squirmed in my brain like demons trapped in a jar. Holy spit! What to do? Sit down and be quiet, as management suggested, or fight like hell to rescue what was disappearing. Since it was not in my nature to retreat to a corner and snivel into silence, I decided to fight. Oh boy, that meant going against the flow of a major corporation and its stockholders. I soon concluded that would be foolhardy. What could work, however, would be a group exodus to a new beginning.

There are a few of us diehards out here who view animation as an art form.

Ed Hansen was the Production Manager for the animation department at the time. I'll never forget the look on his face as Gary Goldman, John Pomeroy, and myself, handed him the three envelopes containing our resignations. "You've got to be kidding," he said, "you're going to throw it all away."

"Absolutely not," I returned, "we're going to offer Disney some friendly competition."

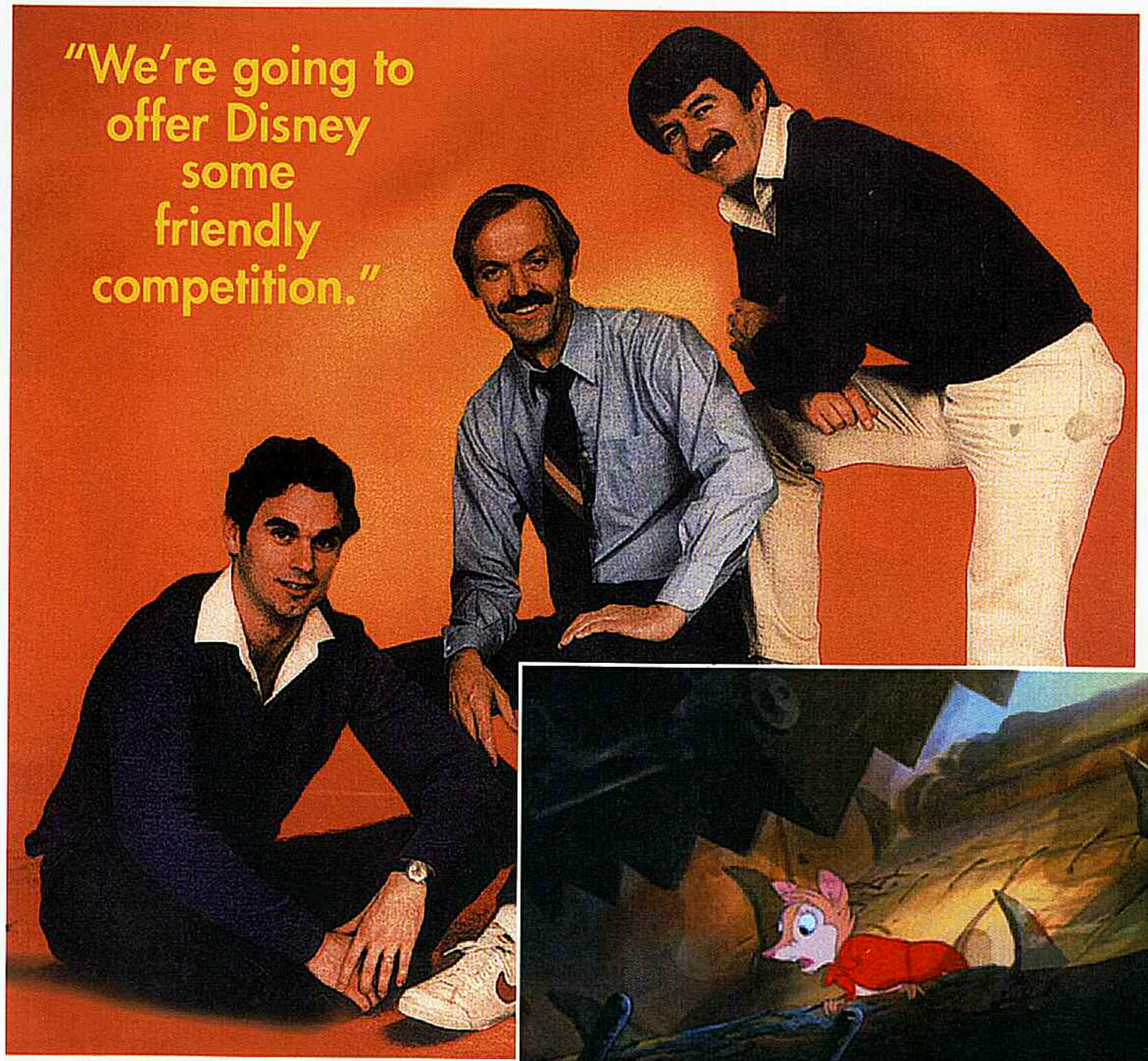
"You're going to do what?" he laughed. "Are you out of your mind?"

Looking back on the scene, I might agree with Ed, but with a few adjectives of my own, arrogant, proud, naive, foolish, and maybe stupid. But, in those days, we three caballeros were emboldened by the fact that an angel, Mr. Joel Greenberg from Chicago, had already committed $6.5 million as an investment in our first film, *The Secret Of Nimh.*

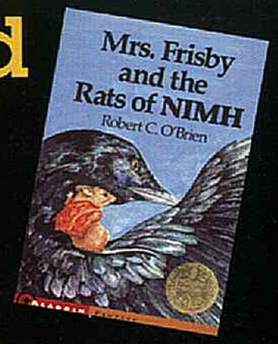
As we were backing out of Ed's office, he scowled and asked, "How many more of our staff are you taking with you?"

"Don't know Ed," said Gary, " there could be more. We can't give you any names right now. They will have to make up their own minds."

And so it was, on September 13, 1979, my birthday, that the battle lines were drawn. Of the original seventeen who left with us, only one remains to this day, Carmen Oliver. Over the years, Gary and myself have produced twelve feature films. I like to think that the competition between Bluth and Disney has helped the business to grow. Definitely, the Disney movies of the last decade, have been a great triumph.



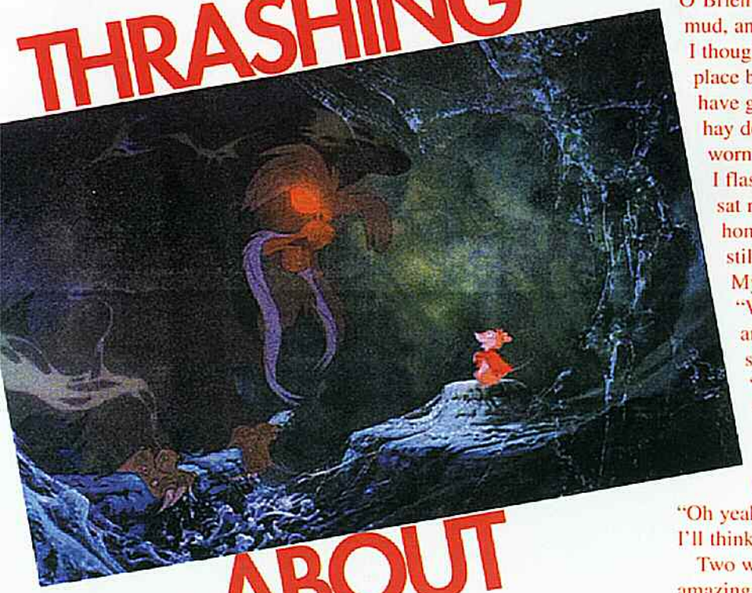
Don't use the "F" word



The movie, *The Secret of NIMH*, is based on a Newbery award-winning book titled, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*. Well into the production of the film, to our horror, we discovered that we could not use the name Frisby, because of the very popular Mattel toy. The word "Frisbee" is spelled differently, but it sounds the same as the heroine of the book. Wouldn't you know, we had already recorded the voices. There were "Frisbys" everywhere, and the cost of re-recording was out of the question. While we were thusly wringing our hands, and beating each other up with sticks for the faux pas, our sound designer on *NIMH*, David Horten, was quietly scraping the magnetic soundtrack with a razor blade, removing all the "F's" from the Frisby words, and splicing in their place, a "B." Suddenly, over the sound system came, "Brisby, Mrs Jonathon Brisby?"

"There," said David, "stop fighting, no one will ever know the difference. Now let's all get back to work." And that, I swear on Aunt Eleanor's grave, is how Frisby got her new name. The devils and the details, don't you think?

THRASHING ABOUT



Mr. Ages, the apothecary mouse that Brisby visits for advice, lives underground. So it says in Robert C. O'Brien's book. But there is something about drawing rocks, mud, and roots of plants that is less than spectacular. I thought to myself, if I could change the venue to some place better, where would that be? I grew up on a farm and have great recollections of playing in the barn, on the old hay derrick, in the manure spreader, and on all the old worn-out farm machinery in the neighbor's field. Bingo! I flashed on an image of a broken, thrashing-machine that sat rusting in Mr. Bird's wheat fields next to my parent's home. Perfect! I phoned my dad. "Is that old thrasher still out there in Birds field?" "Sure is," he said.

My heart began to pound.

"Would you do me a big favor? Take your Polaroid and crawl down inside it and snap some interior shots?"

"What?" he barked.

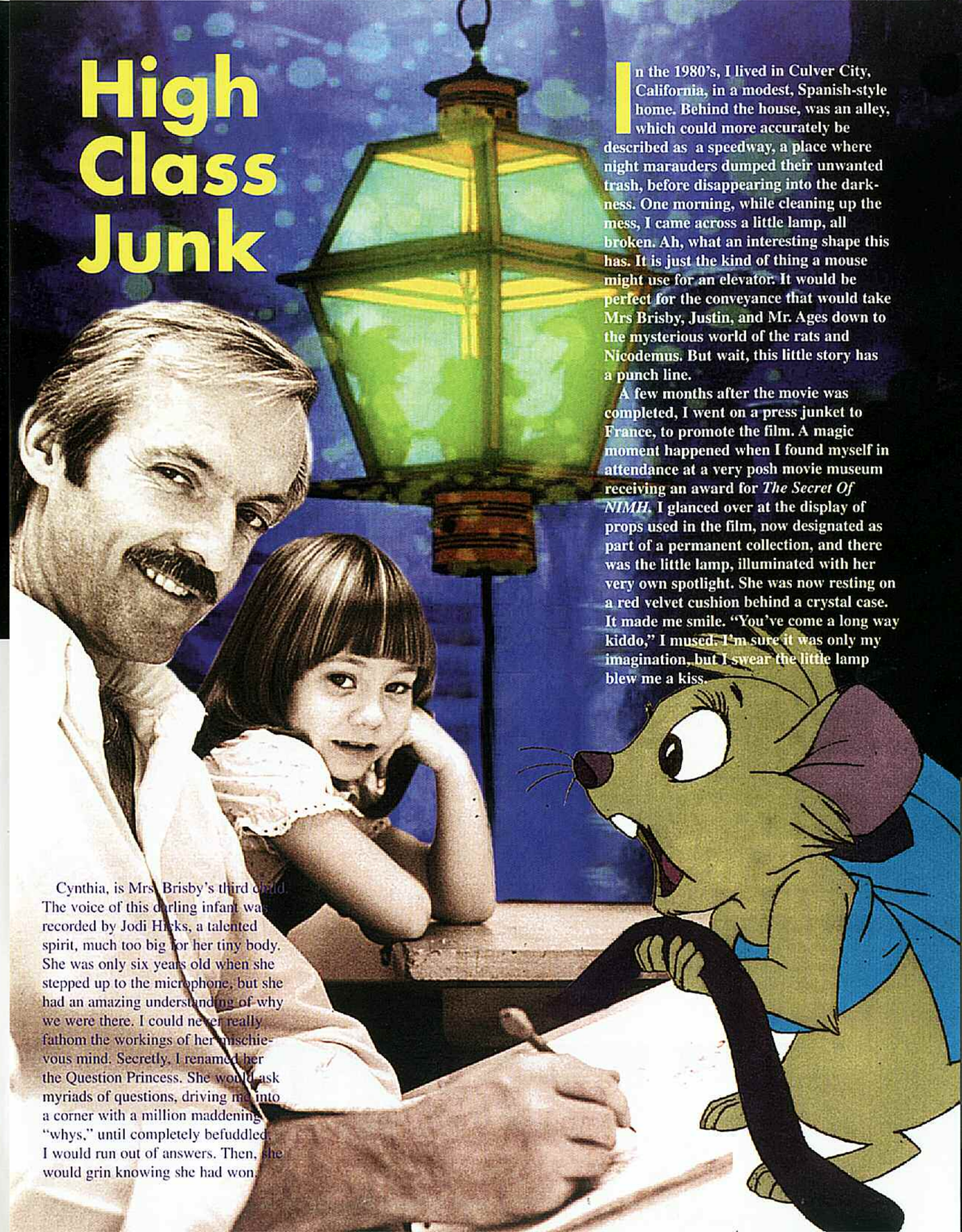
"I need to know what it looks like inside a thrashing machine, Dad."

"I need to not get bitten by Black Widow spiders, Don," he growled.

"Oh yeah, spiders. You're right. It's too dangerous, forget it. I'll think of something else. Bye Pop."

Two weeks later, to my delight and surprise, the most amazing photos arrived in the mail, detailing the guts of a thrashing machine. How he got inside that iron beast with his camera, I'll never know. Anyway, thanks dad.

High Class Junk



In the 1980's, I lived in Culver City, California, in a modest, Spanish-style home. Behind the house, was an alley, which could more accurately be described as a speedway, a place where night marauders dumped their unwanted trash, before disappearing into the darkness. One morning, while cleaning up the mess, I came across a little lamp, all broken. Ah, what an interesting shape this has. It is just the kind of thing a mouse might use for an elevator. It would be perfect for the conveyance that would take Mrs Brisby, Justin, and Mr. Ages down to the mysterious world of the rats and Nicodemus. But wait, this little story has a punch line.

A few months after the movie was completed, I went on a press junket to France, to promote the film. A magic moment happened when I found myself in attendance at a very posh movie museum receiving an award for *The Secret Of NIMH*. I glanced over at the display of props used in the film, now designated as part of a permanent collection, and there was the little lamp, illuminated with her very own spotlight. She was now resting on a red velvet cushion behind a crystal case. It made me smile. "You've come a long way kiddo," I mused. I'm sure it was only my imagination, but I swear the little lamp blew me a kiss.

Cynthia, is Mrs. Brisby's third child. The voice of this darling infant was recorded by Jodi Hicks, a talented spirit, much too big for her tiny body. She was only six years old when she stepped up to the microphone, but she had an amazing understanding of why we were there. I could never really fathom the workings of her mischievous mind. Secretly, I renamed her the Question Princess. She would ask myriads of questions, driving me into a corner with a million maddening "whys," until completely befuddled, I would run out of answers. Then, she would grin knowing she had won.

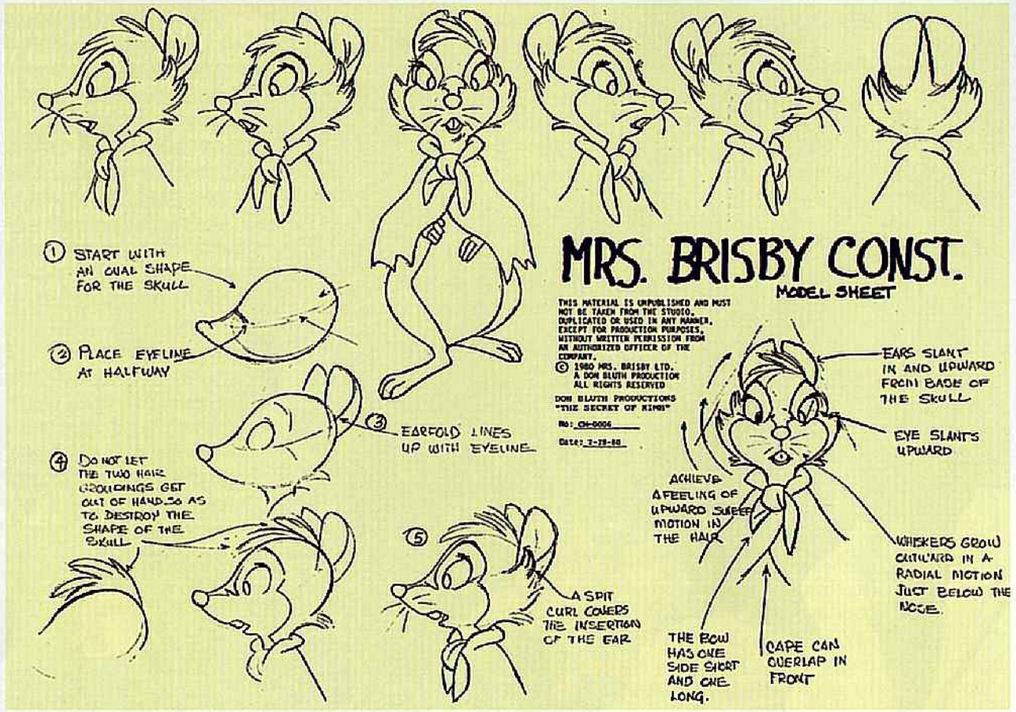
Shop Talk

Synopsis: *The Secret Of NIMH,* based on the Newbery award-winning book, *Mrs. Frisby And The Rats Of NIMH,* by Robert C. O'Brien, is the story of a widowed mouse, struggling to save her family. She lives in a cinder block in farmer Fitzgibbons field. Like the other animals, she must move when the farmer begins to plow in the spring. Unlike the others, however, Mrs. Brisby has a problem. Her son Timothy has pneumonia, and cannot be moved or he will die.

She comes into contact with some mysterious rats that, as a result of extensive laboratory experiments at the National Institute of Mental Health, have become highly intelligent, and have created their own complex civilization underground. She is surprised to discover that her late husband, Jonathon, was instrumental in helping the rats escape from *NIMH.* In gratitude, they assist Brisby in moving the cinder block, and her family, to the lee of the stone, away from the plow.

In return, she warns the rats, just before the scientists from *NIMH* arrive with extermination gear.

There is, of course, a happy reunion with Brisby, her children and their friends. But she becomes gradually aware, as farmer Fitzgibbons, and the *NIMH* scientists already have, that there is no physical trace of any rats, anywhere. We, the audience, and Brisby also, get the ambiguous feeling that the Rats of *NIMH* never existed, that perhaps they were all a self-improving hallucination.


MRS. BRISBY CONST.
MODEL SHEET
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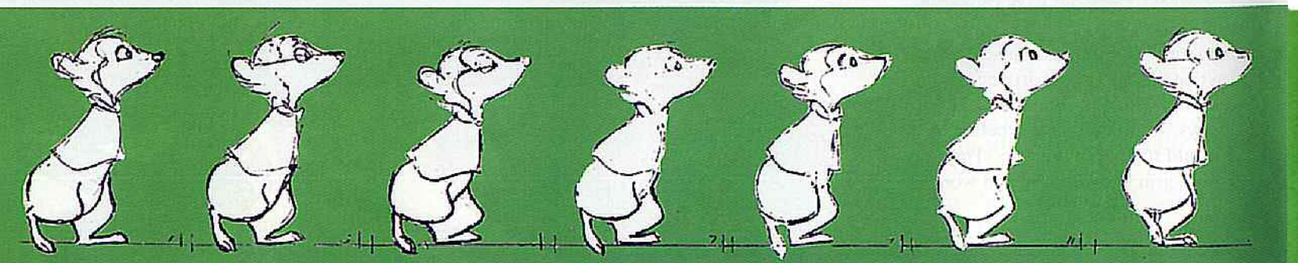
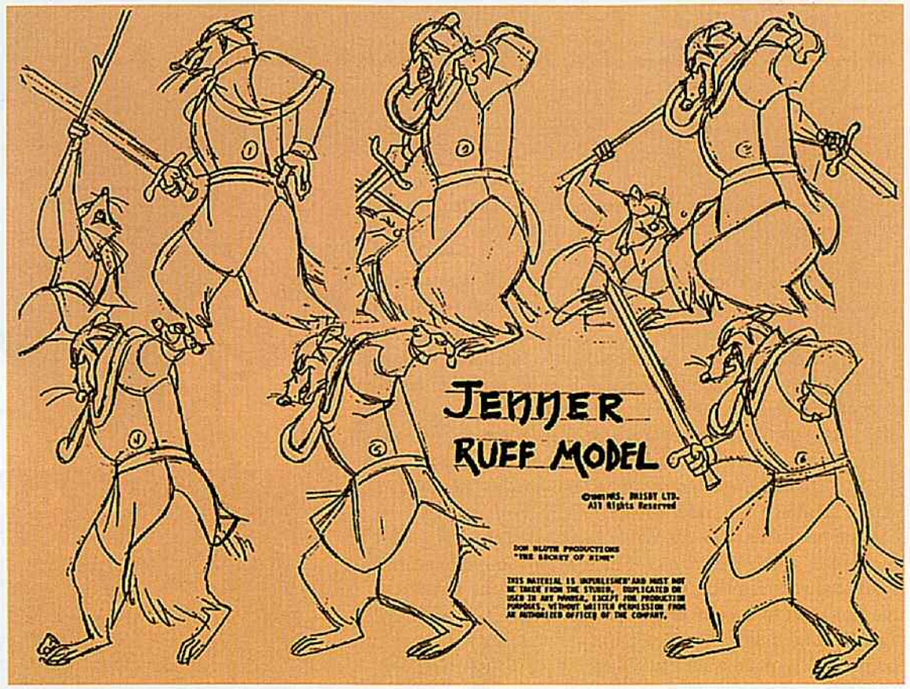
DON BLUTH PRODUCTIONS
"THE SECRET OF NIMH"
No.: CH-0006
Date: 2-28-80
1 START WITH AN OVAL SHAPE FOR THE SKULL
2 PLACE EYELINE AT HALFWAY
3 EARFOLD LINES UP WITH EYELINE
4 DO NOT LET THE TWO HAIR GROWINGS GET OUT OF HAND SO AS TO DESTROY THE SHAPE OF THE SKULL
5 A SPIT CURL COVERS THE INSERTION OF THE EAR
EARS SLANT IN AND UPWARD FROM BASE OF THE SKULL
EYE SLANTS UPWARD
ACHIEVE A FEELING OF UPWARD SWEEP MOTION IN THE HAIR
WHISKERS GROW OUTWARD IN A RADIAL MOTION JUST BELOW THE NOSE.
THE BOW HAS ONE SIDE SHORT AND ONE LONG.
CAPE CAN OVERLAP IN FRONT

Character Design. Brisby was not Valedictorian in her graduating class from Mouse Town University. In fact, she didn't even go to college. She hails from a small town in the midwest with only the most basic credentials. She married young, but when her husband mysteriously disappeared, she was forced into the role of both mother and father to a family of four. Her heroic journey to protect her children from the farmers plow, pulls her into a more complex universe than she has ever known.

Observe the model sheet. Notice the amazed expression on her face and the uneasy, cautious posture in her walk. She is a character with little confidence. She could easily come across as unintelligent. To overcome this pitfall in the design, we fashioned her hairdo to look otherwise. Notice the sweep of her hair and ears upwards, echoing the fashion of the Victorian era, and the Gibson Girls.




JENNER
RUFF MODEL
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"THE SECRET OF NIMH"
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Model sheets are used to keep a character looking consistent throughout the movie. Although they are a great help, they can trip you up. The sheets on these two pages are distinctly different.
The Brisby sheet is like a machete, intending to show how to draw the face in a turnaround. It is rigid in structure, diagrammatic in form, and does not reveal her soul. The Jenner model sheet, on the other hand, is the opposite. It is a snippet of action, more revealing of his feelings. Both types are used for models, but let's talk about which ones to use, and when.

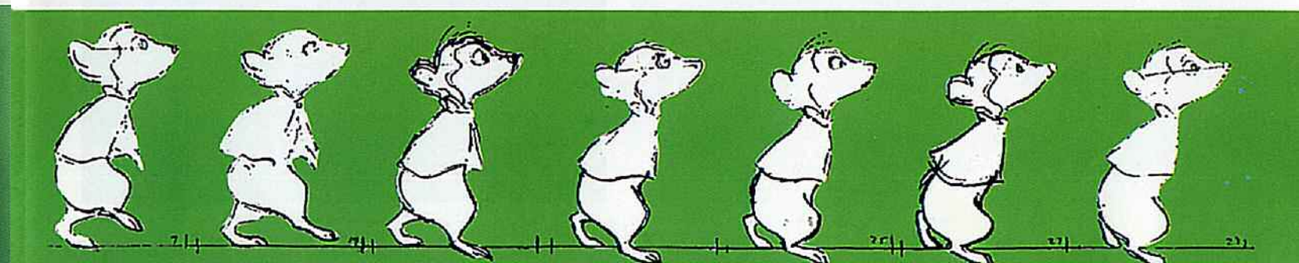
An artist makes a drawing, and that's the end of it. But, when an animator makes a drawing, that's only the beginning. Animation, you see, is not about on-model drawings. It is about acting. Animators are actors. Did you know that actors refer to their bodies as their instrument? An instrument used to play a range of emotional cadences. Well, I think of drawings in the same way. They are a medium in which we express something more profound, more human, and more universal to human understanding.

The Jenner model sheet depicts a movie moment that goes beyond the choreography of a sword fight. It is the clash of good and evil, hacking it out to the death. Jenner wants to kill Justin, (the good guy) because he has rallied all of the Rats of *NIMH* to refrain from stealing from the farmer, while at the same time, seek out a new land, Thorn Valley. With their newly acquired intelligence, they can work and provide for themselves.

"Take what you can when you can," growls Jenner. "That's what I've learned." "Then you've learned nothing," returns Justin.

As Jenner's hatred intensifies towards his opponent during the battle, the adrenalin surges in his veins, his reaction time sharpens, his eyes narrow, and his hair bristles. This emotional melody must be played on the instrument of your drawings. If you keep referring to your diagrammatic model sheet, you could derail in this impassioned moment. Let me repeat this again. Animation is not about the drawings, but about the transcendent message the drawings express. Once this light bulb goes on in your head, the whole approach to your work will be cleaner and more effective.

In her book, *The Magic Of Screenplay Writing*, Donna Lee speaks about the villain with great respect. "You're story will be as strong and significant as your villain factor, whether this factor derives from the visible world, or two opposing desires in the same character. In modern fiction, take care not to make the villain melodramatic. Let the audience know enough about his background to understand why he is now behaving the way he does. Give him a strong motivation. Then, set all of this off by giving him one or two sympathetic or clever traits. This creates far more interest than an out-and-out bad guy. Further, the stronger and more devious your evil force, the angrier the audience will feel when he wins a round, and the more satisfaction it will feel when the hero triumphs in the end. By the way, did you know that opera villains are almost always sung by basses or baritones. The deep throat chilling sound of Jenner came from Paul Shenar. For more details on Paul Shenar, check out his bios at **www.imdb.com.**



Shop Talk

It is with some trepidation that I embark on a discussion of the "How to" of animation. There are many approaches. Creativity can veer off in many directions. So, as a precursor to my mindless rambling, let me warn you that my way is not the only way. It's a personal approach. You, certainly, will find your own.

The first idea I would like to place on the table is this. Any animated piece, whatever its length, has a purpose. For me, that would be to delight the audience, surprise them, entertain them, and maybe, inform them. Avoid getting too intellectual about this whole process, but every once in a while, pop your head up to see if you are in that ballpark. I have found that if I can make a drawing that tickles my own fancy, chances are, someone else will get it too. Test it. Discount your mother's accolades, she is too subjective. Remember, anything you draw, sooner or later, will be scrutinized. I prefer sooner.

In the portfolios of Oscar Wilde's fairytales, there is a short story titled, *The Happy Prince*. Since we are currently gearing up to produce this piece, we are wrestling with the myriads of questions that frequently plague pre-production. So, what say if in this, and future Shop Talks, I invite you to come along for the ride. I'll explain what I'm doing in the production while you peek over my shoulder.

SCRIPT

Lack of space will not permit me to publish Wilde's story on these pages, but you can read it on **www.donbluth.com,** or go to your local library. In a nutshell, it is the story of a barn swallow that delays his winter migration to Egypt, in an effort to help a statue of a prince, alleviate the suffering of the poor in the city. He is consequently trapped in winter's bitter cold and dies. Really! Well isn't that a cheery little tale, you might say.

No, it's not, I'd agree. But there of course, is the challenge. There is something compelling about how Oscar Wilde tells the story.

SCHEDULE AND BUDGET

I am going to want to take some time to create a schedule, and a budget for *The Happy Prince* production. This is important. I do not want to spend more money making the piece than it has potential to earn when it goes to market. This exercise is tedious, but it will pay off for you. Do it!

Since all birds have their own flight pattern, we need to study how the Barn Swallow flies. In the coming Shop Talk, we will look at nature videos, and translate the flight action into our first animated scene.

OSCAR WILDE

Nineteenth century writer and intellectual, Oscar Wilde, was born October 16, 1854 in Dublin, Ireland. Wilde led an eccentric life that fueled his witty satires and epigrams on Victorian society. As a member of the aesthetic movement in literature, Wilde advocated the idea of art for arts sake. Oscar Wilde died November 30, 1900.

Character Design

This is the part that I like best. I picture the little swallow as a tough guy, one with the irascibility of the Artful Dodger, from the movie *Oliver*. He has always got some deal in the works, something cooking, some fabulous scheme about to unfold. This is the kind of guy who refuses to be a looser.

To begin with, I collect photos of barn swallows and study the silhouette of the bird. Arriving there, the real exploration begins. Draw whatever you might see in your head. You are searching for pieces of a puzzle. You can miss more than you hit, but forge ahead until you get one drawing that says it.

If you've captured the Artful Dodger, in swallow form, then redraw it with stronger poses that better defines his attitude. Keep redrawing him until you nail it. With each attempt, it should improve. The next step, I explore a turn-around of the character showing the front, back, and sides, both standing and flying. Pick out the sketches that are most appealing to you, and build a preliminary model sheet. Show this to someone whose judgment you trust to get his/her reaction. Do not be defensive. Just listen.

The Hero

My first thoughts are always about the hero. Our hero, the little barn swallow, is going to sacrifice himself for the welfare of others. To make him interesting, his personality should be tuned in such a way that self-destruction is the last thing in the world he would want to do.
The compelling question that the audience will then ask is, why? What pushes him to lay down his life?

The Colors of *NIMH*

They vibrate with energy. They are a dazzling symphony of delightful hues, plagued with such virtuosity that they sometimes leave you breathless. Don Moore is the man who found the look of *NIMH*. He and his team, Ron Diaz, and Bill Lorenz, skillfully navigate their way to triumph, with Strathmore and gouache, to redefine the art of animation background painting. Bravo Guys!

Teresa, Martin and Cynthia are surprised by Auntie Shrews visit.

Jeremy faces certain death in the form of Dragon the cat.

Jeremy consoles Mrs. Brisby who has lost Timmy's medicine.

Jeremy returns the packet of medicine, and Mrs. Brisby is relieved.

Mrs. Brisby enters the mysterious rose bush to find the Rats of NIMH.

Once inside the bush, she meets Mr. Ages, who is on a secret mission.

Jenner and Sullivan plot the death of the Rats leader, Nicodemus.

With flattering words Jenner welcomes Mrs. Brisby to the Rats domain.

Mrs. Brisby asks for help from Nicodemus in saving Timmy's life.

She's instructed to read more about the mysterious Rats of NIMH.

Mrs. Brisby is gifted an amulet which holds great power.

Jeremy sees the amulet as a "sparkly," and wants it.

The color styling of the characters of *NIMH*, springs from the imagination of Carmen Oliver. As the characters move through shadows and light, she chooses a unique palette to reflect each moment. The effect is stunningly realistic, and requires a sophisticated knowledge of the color wheel.

Carmen is a problem solver, and we've always felt confident with her on board. She, by the way, is the only remaining person from the original fifteen that exited Disney with Gary and Don in 1979.

SPOTLIGHT on Stars

DOM

TT: Dom, It's been eighteen years since you created Jeremy, the crow. Looking back on that moment, what do you think?
Dom: What immediately comes to mind is that wonderful moment when we were in the theatre, filled with children, and Jeremy came to life for the first time. I know it was only pencil drawings, but the kids were laughing at the crazy, inept crow. It made me very excited to realize that pencil markings, and a little bit of my voice, could get such a great response.

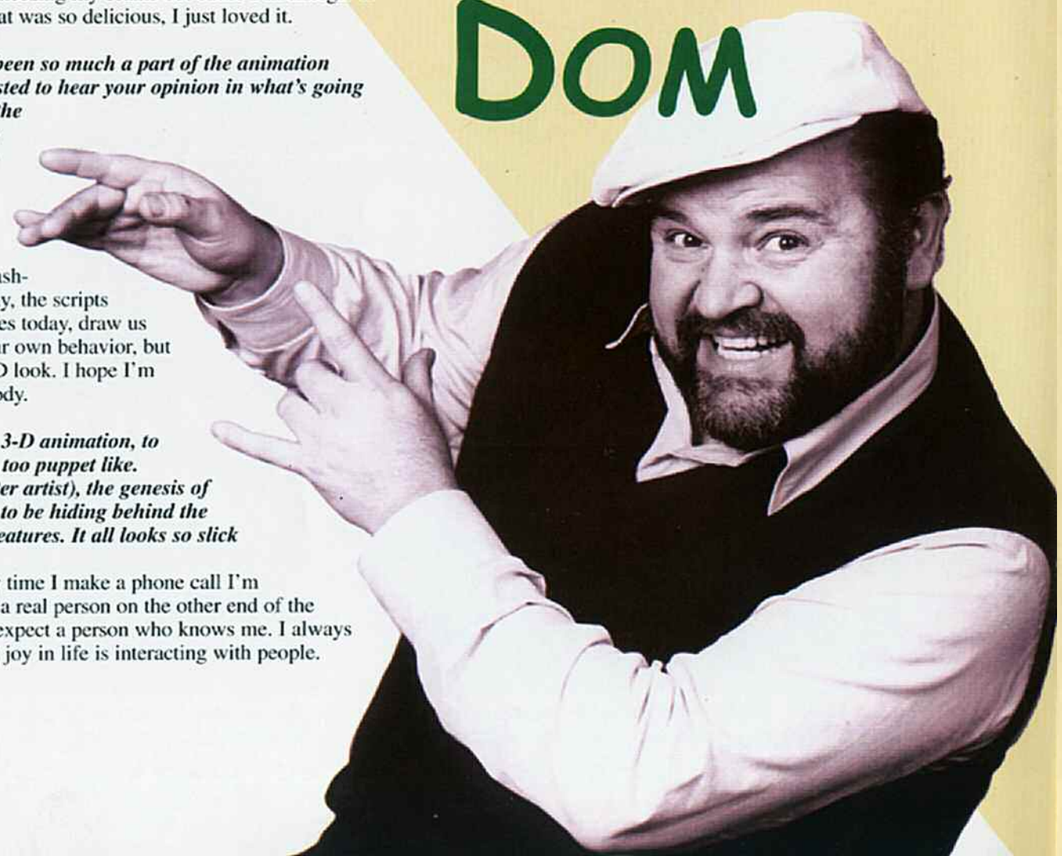
TT: I've worked with you a lot over the years, Dom. Jeremy was fabulous, and who could forget Tiger in* The American Tail, *and of course, the impressionable, Itchy, in* All Dogs Go To Heaven. *In every character, you've always added great depth to the personality, beyond what was written on the scripted page, stuff that seemed to spring out of a very personal part of your life. I'll always remember when Jeremy spotted Mrs. Brisby's sparkly. That was yours. So Dom, where did it come from?
Dom: Search me! It just happened. I'm never sure. Ideas just pop into my head. What I do recall, though, is Jeremy's allergies. Remember, he says to Mrs. Brisby, "That's not a cat, it's a rabbit. If it were a cat, I'd be sneezing my brains out cause I'm allergic to cats." Heh heh heh! That was so delicious, I just loved it.

TT: For years, you've been so much a part of the animation community. I'm interested to hear your opinion in what's going on in our business on the cosmic level? They say 3-D animation is overtaking 2-D animation. What do you think of that?
Dom: Naw, I like the old stuff. Call me old fashioned. Still, I have to say, the scripts are getting better. Movies today, draw us into what smells like our own behavior, but visually, I prefer the 2-D look. I hope I'm not disappointing anybody.

TT: Decidedly, not me. 3-D animation, to me, seems very distant, too puppet like. The puppeteer (computer artist), the genesis of human feelings, seems to be hiding behind the faces of his/her own creatures. It all looks so slick and technical.
Dom: Oh please! Every time I make a phone call I'm disappointed. It's never a real person on the other end of the line, just a recording. I expect a person who knows me. I always feel cheated. Part of my joy in life is interacting with people.

TT: You know Dom, I think the arts are the leavening of our society. Acting, what you do, carries us all to distant worlds where we gather dreams and birth new aspirations. Do you think in a subtle way, machines can rob us of all that?
Dom: Absolutely! I remember when my son was 12 years old. He came to me and said, "When do I stop hugging you dad?" "Never," I shouted, "never." My life has always been one hug looking for the next. You know, my idea of heaven is to sit in a room with friends, have a snack, and then, share stories with each other about growing up.

TT: Remember when your Mom used to read you a bedtime story, or she would sit next to you at the movies? Those were great growing-up times. TV is a poor substitute for that.
Dom: Yes, I agree. I like TV shows where someone is cooking, or repairing, or caring for a pet, or gardening. I always get a feeling for what that person is really like, and that they care enough about me to give me personal instruction. I love personal!



TT: Do you mind if I gush about you for a moment?
Dom: By all means, go for it!

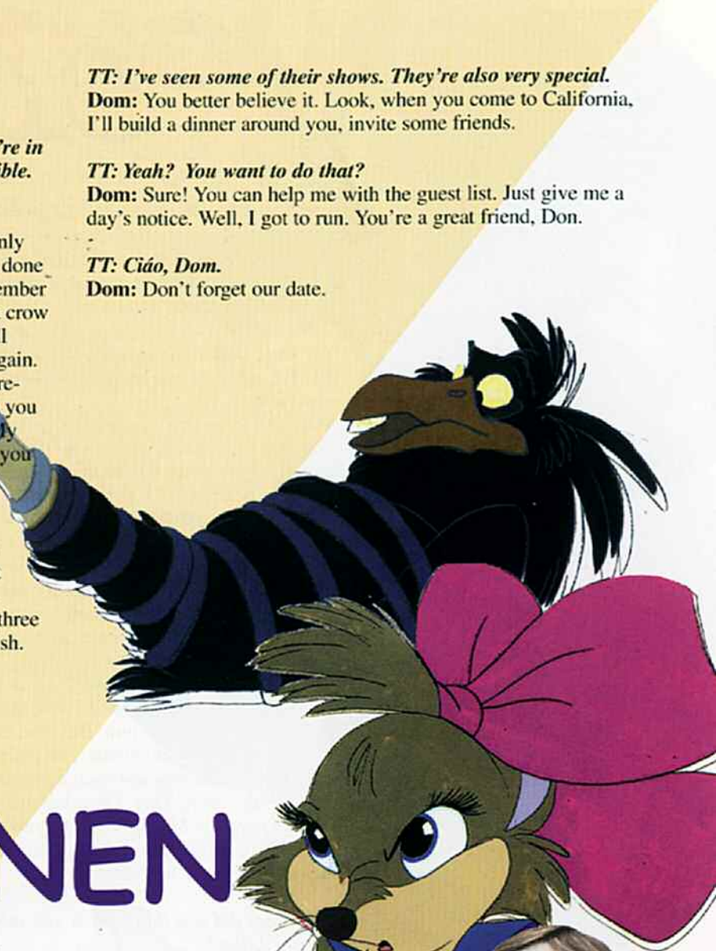
TT: Because of the guy you are, so humanistic, when you're in front of an audience or camera, your feelings are very visible. We all see that. It's that part of you that is so loving that reassures us. It's like a friend we can trust.
Dom: Oh thank you, that makes me glad. All my life, the only things that have meant anything to me are the things I have done organically. It's never just "the job." I love my work. I remember when we started recording Jeremy, I had been working on a crow voice for about a week. You heard it and said, "No!" "Oh all right," I said, "how about *this voice*?" "No," you snapped again. After three more attempts, I finally gave up. Dropping all pretense, I asked you with nonchalance, "Well, which voice do you want?" "That one," you said, grinning, "the Dom Voice." "My voice, heh heh heh, you want my voice, alright, why didn't you say so?" You know what I think is very important?

TT: No, but I've a feeling you're going to tell me.
Dom: Yes, I am! When you're working, you know, doing a voice over, or just acting, be flexible, spontaneous, and trust your instincts. Take those risks. Steven Spielberg once said, "Acting is the willingness to let yourself look foolish." My three sons are all actors, and good ones. My whole family is foolish.

TT: I've seen some of their shows. They're also very special.
Dom: You better believe it. Look, when you come to California, I'll build a dinner around you, invite some friends.

TT: Yeah? You want to do that?
Dom: Sure! You can help me with the guest list. Just give me a day's notice. Well, I got to run. You're a great friend, Don.

TT: Ciáo, Dom.
Dom: Don't forget our date.



SHANNEN

To all of you who have seen the talented and bewitching Shannen Doherty on the current t.v. series, *Women of Charmed,* or previously, *Satan's School For Girls*, or *Striking Poses*, may I say, she is as beguiling an actress as any on the current Hollywood scene. In 1982, when she created the role of Teresa, Brisby's oldest daughter, in *The Secret of NIMH*, Shannen was charmingly innocent, and quiet as a mouse. She was wearing a large blue bow in her hair the first day of recording, which struck me as daring. And her generous laughter spilled out into the room dispelling all those anxieties that happen to directors that are faced with the task of working with animals or children. Shannen was always eager to please, and decidedly talented, even at age ten. She had me relaxed within the first three minutes. "This session will be a piece of cake," I thought. And it was. At the time, I remember saying to my assistant, "I'll bet she will make it big in the business." And, she did. Thanks Shannen for Teresa, and everything else you have given us. You're the, crème de la crème.

SPOTLIGHT on Stars

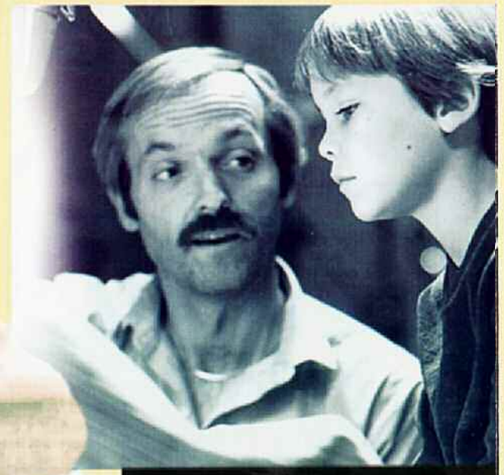
TT: Wow Wil, what's it been, 20 years?
Wil: Yeah, I've seen the *Titan A.E.* previews for months now. I have two children, and I was telling my son that I had done a movie for you when I was a kid.

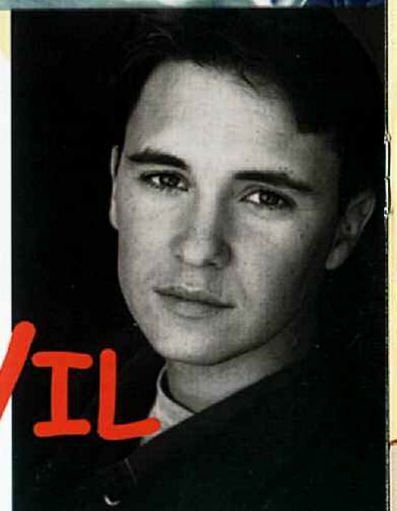
TT: Well, that made my day, thank you.* NIMH, *what do you remember about the experience?
Wil: The thing that I remember most clearly was that I thought it was so odd that I was recording my voice before the movie was going to be drawn. I was having a hard time putting that together in my head. How could you record my voice, and then draw me later? Being ten years old, and doing a voice for an animated movie was a big deal for me. Sure, I'd done commercials, but nothing to impress my friends. And those scenes with Dom DeLuise, wow! I remember my sides aching from laughter. You know, my parents told me that Dom was a big star and I should be respectful when I met him. But after being with Dom for fifteen minutes, he put me at ease because he was just such a normal nice guy. Furthermore, Don, I was bummed out when I saw that Martin was a fat mouse, and I was a skinny little kid. I guess I hoped that he would look more like me.

TT: What did you think when you saw the finished film?
Wil: I recall the preview screenings, and remember seeing just pencil drawings and scene cards. It was all so rough. But, when I went to the premiere, it was suddenly very clear. The anticipation I felt leading up to that moment was greater than what I felt for my first *Star Trek* episode on t.v. Back then, I was really sophisticated in the way I prepared for roles. I remember you saying, " Wil, Martin's dad was gone, so even though Teresa is older, Martin is still the man of the house." As a ten year old actor my instincts took me there.

TT: What's it like for your sons, Ryan and Nolan, to have a famous father?
Wil: Compared to the Back Street Boys, I'm not really a big deal. But when *Flubber* was released, I went to their school, and oh boy, you would have thought I was one of the Beatles. I don't kid myself. But for now, it's great. I do a lot of improv these days. My son came to me one night and said, "Dad, what's improv?" I explained it's like practice sessions to become a better actor. Nolan stared at me, then said, "Well, I think you're a very good actor." "Geez Nolan," I replied, "that's very nice, thank you." "I wasn't saying it to be nice Dad. You really are a good actor." Forget the Oscar, I'll keep that compliment. My kids have seen *Secret of NIMH* and think it's incredibly cool. Almost 20 years after the fact, it still plays, and of course, my sons and their friends know that I am in *NIMH*, and they think that is awesome. I'm a hero.

TT: Well hero, thank you, I've loved every minute of it.
Wil: The pleasure was mine.



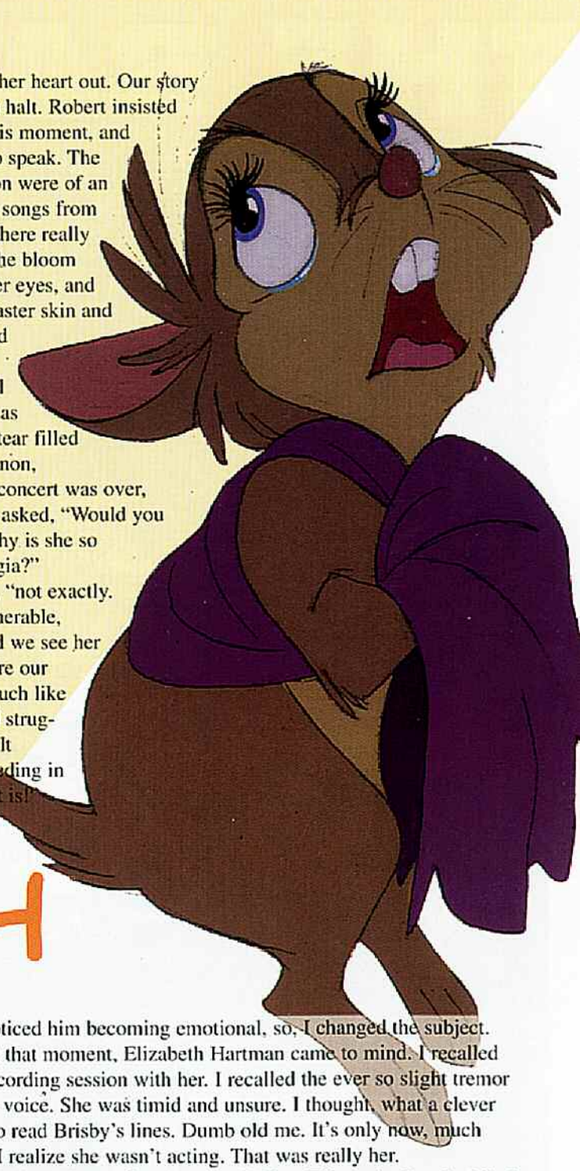


WIL

It's been eighteen years since I stood beside Elizabeth Hartman in front of the microphones. It goes without saying, she was a brilliant actress, you know, the kind that navigates through a role with practically no coaching from a director. It would have been such a thrill to see her again and get her thoughts on the *NIMH* experience, but she tragically died in 1985. For more details on Elizabeth Hartman, check out her bios at **www.imdb.com.** What I can do here on the page is detail what I think made her a great actress, and explain why she was perfect for the part as Mrs. Brisby.

About fifteen years ago, I was privileged to work with a brilliant screenwriter named Robert Towne. You would recognize his work immediately, *China Town, Greystoke, Two Jakes, Tequila Sunrise*, and many more. At the time, John, Gary, and myself, were working on a project with Robert called, *The Little Blue Whale*. In those days, we didn't know very much about anything, we were minnows, mere fledglings trying to soak up as much knowledge as possible about the film business. More than a collaborator, Robert became our mentor. One evening, as we sat with Robert at his Santa Monica beach apartment-discussing story, suddenly, there on television appeared Judy Garland, singing her heart out. Our story meeting screeched to a halt. Robert insisted that everyone watch this moment, and nobody was allowed to speak. The images on the television were of an older Judy, belting out songs from her past, a time when there really was a rainbow, when the bloom of youth sparkled in her eyes, and radiated from her alabaster skin and full lips. All now, faded into memories. Still, the voice was powerful and the audience vast, as they watched through tear filled eyes. What a phenomenon, I pondered. When the concert was over, I turned to Robert and asked, "Would you explain something? Why is she so loved? Is it just nostalgia?"

"No," he whispered, "not exactly. It's because she is vulnerable, fragile, if you will, and we see her overcome it right before our very eyes. It is very much like watching a small child struggling through a difficult moment, before succeeding in triumph. That's what it is!"



ELIZABETH

I noticed him becoming emotional, so, I changed the subject. But at that moment, Elizabeth Hartman came to mind. I recalled the recording session with her. I recalled the ever so slight tremor in her voice. She was timid and unsure. I thought, what a clever way to read Brisby's lines. Dumb old me. It's only now, much later, I realize she wasn't acting. That was really her.

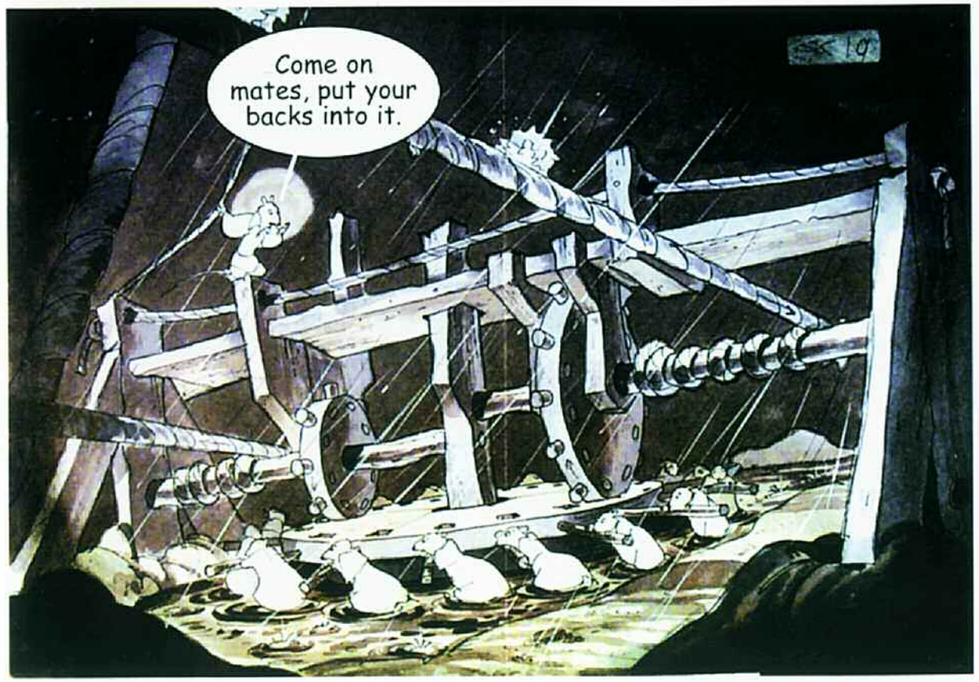
As Selina D'arcey in, *A Patch Of Blue*, Elizabeth played a blind girl. Her take on Selina's personality was so well approached that I never felt pity for the character, only joy, as she triumphed repeatedly. The part of Mrs. Brisby is a slippery slope. The little mouse could easily have been overwhelmed at the obstacles thrown in her path, or whined her way from scene to scene to become pathetic. How off-putting that would have been. In hindsight, I realize I never really directed Elizabeth. Her own natural instincts did the job. I also admit the comparison to Judy Garland is unfair, it's like apples and oranges. But, thank you Robert Towne for helping me understand. Today, I can now appreciate why Elizabeth's rare talent was so appealing. And to you, Elizabeth, wherever you are, thank you for Mrs. Brisby. I will not forget the experience. The pleasure was all mine.

THE BAD GUY

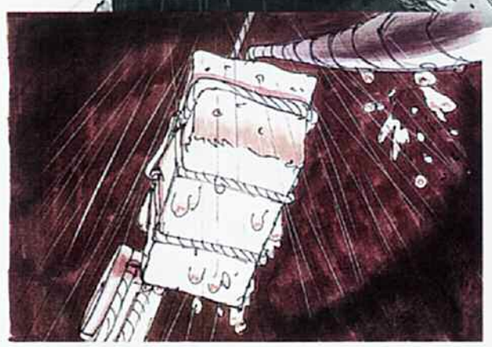
Because Jonathon Brisby helped the rats escape the lab experiments at NIMH, the rats now repaid the favor by moving the widow Brisby's home away from the danger of the plow. Jenner uses this charitable moment to his own advantage, to kill Nicodemus, leader of the rats. He tries to make it look like an accident.

Sullivan the rat, is weak willed. He still has a bit of his conscience left, and it bothers him. If he were truly smart, he would never have joined up with Jenner in the first place. Here on the precipice of committing a truly evil act, he backs off, knowing full well he will be beaten for this.

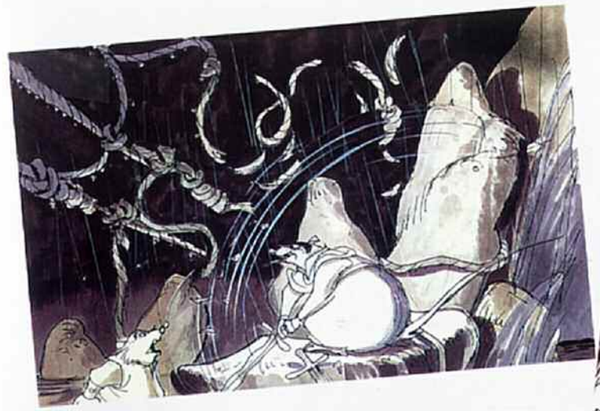
When the block reaches mid-way, you cut the ropes.
I don't want any part of this.
Don't get any ideas my friend . . .
you're in this up to your scruffy neck.

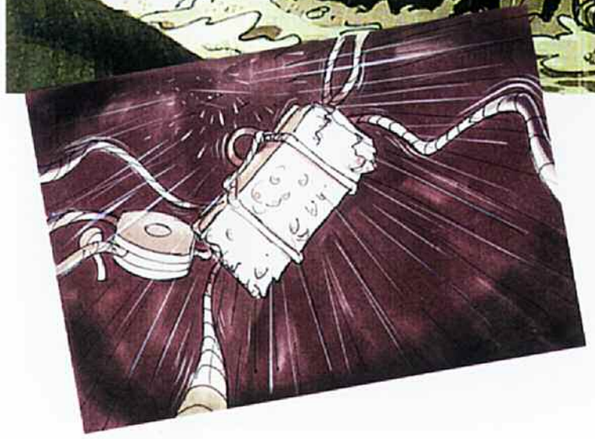


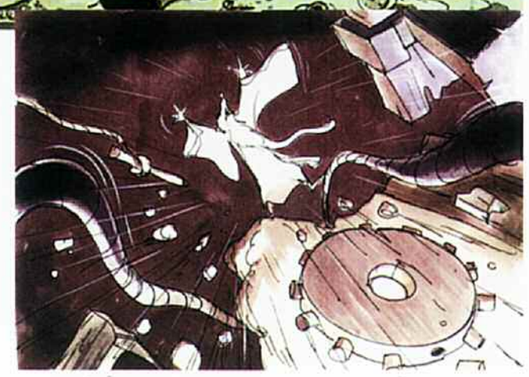
It is the fear of losing the political game that drives Jenner to his villainy. If Nicodemus should win, the rats will leave the farm for Thorn Valley, where they must work to earn their own food, a thought most loathsome to Jenner. Stealing is easier



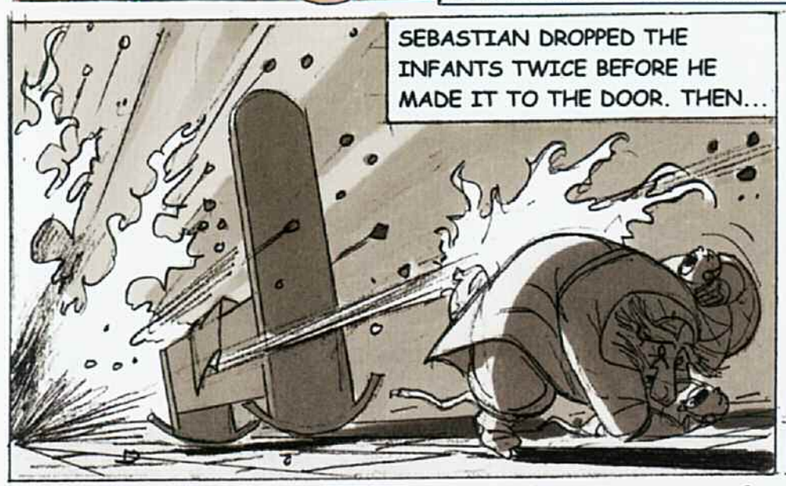
Leaping into action, Jenner cuts the ropes supporting the cinderblock. Now weakened, the other lines begin to snap like threads. The wooden rigging splinters apart. Rats scamper every which way as the block, with Brisby's children inside, plummets to the ground, taking Nicodemus with it in a tangle of lines that pull him beneath the mud.







DRAGON'S LAIR
EPISODE II
THINK BACK! SEBASTIAN'S ATTEMPT TO KIDNAP THE ROYAL INFANT FAILED, HOW WAS HE TO GUESS THAT THE SAME NIGHT THE KINGS ALCHEMIST AND A POWERFUL DRAGON, VRAXXIS, WOULD LAY SEIGE TO THE PALACE, KILLING THE KING AND QUEEN, MAKING THE RANSOM IMPOSSIBLE. WORSE YET, THERE WAS A DECOY CHILD. THE KING PUT THEIR SAFETY IN SEBASTIAN'S CARE, THEN, RAN OFF...



THE CROWN WAS SNATCHED UP FROM THE DECEASED MONARCH, AND PLACED ON SERIN, THE ALCHEMIST'S HEAD.

ROAR

ALRIGHT! STOP, STOP, STOP. I'LL GIVE YOU THE ELIXIR NOW!

VRAXXIS SERPENTINE TONGUE SLAMS SERIN TO THE FLOOR...

WHERE HE IS PULLED TO SAFETY BY THE GUARDS.

WITH ALL HASTE THE ELIXIR IS BROUGHT FORTH. THE NEW KING OFFERS IT TO VRAXXIS.

MEANWHILE, SEBASTIAN BOPPED AWAY IN A DINGY

THE BRAYING FITS OF VRAXXIS' ANGER FROM ABOVE STARLED THE BABIES.

IN THE GRAND HALL THE DRAGON BROUGHT THE ELIXIR TO HIS...

GAPPING MAW, AND EAGERLY WOLFED IT DOWN. THEN...

AT A SAFE DISTANCE, SERIN WATCHED, KNOWING THE OUTCOME.

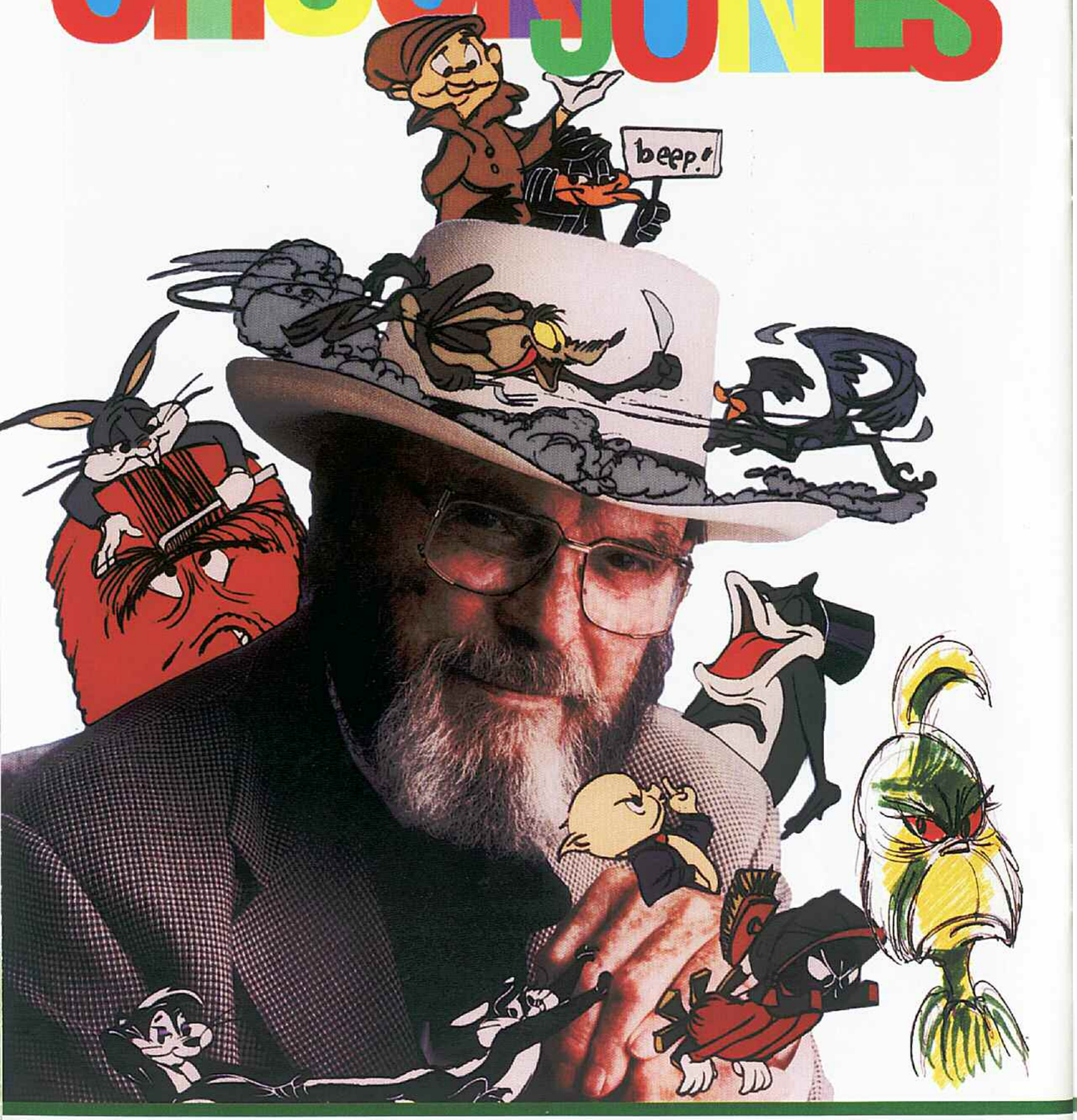
VRAXXIS SPIT, AND STIFFINED IN BELLOWING ANGER, AS THE POWERFUL ELIXIR INVADED HIS ANATOMY, WHILE

Don Bluth

. . .to be continued

WIZARDS of the BIZ

CHUCK JONES



DB: ***A lot of my friends are leaving the 2-D animation arena to embark on a 3-D career in animation, perhaps feeling that is the move of the future. Traditional pencil drawing is no longer the business; it's the computer models. How do you feel about that?***

CJ: As far as I'm concerned, all animation starts with pencil and paper, that's it. Whatever you add enhances the original point, or form of expression. In your last film, *Anastasia*, you emphasized that point well. I got a lot of pleasure from it.

DB: ***I believe 3-D animation could be a fad. It's new, so enthusiasm for this is the natural reaction.*** **Toy Story, A Bug's Life, Dinosaur,** ***are all great, but I think somewhere it will swing back. Trends tend to move in cycles, right? I don't want young talent to get discouraged and stop drawing.***

CJ: In my opinion, an animator needs to be able to draw in the classic sense as you do, and your pictures demonstrate. A good education is also essential. For example, Grimon Natwick was a talent who could not only animate, but had something worthwhile to say.

DB: ***Amen, that's on the nose!***

CJ: And the only way to have something to say is to get as broad an education as possible, get interested in everything. I'm not just talking about schooling either. Ray Bradbury and I used to play a game with words. Pick out any word in the dictionary, for example, "dog," then look at all of its definitions, which in turn, would lead to other words in the dictionary, as well as their meanings. Eventually, this knowledge will expand well beyond what you used to think when you heard the word "dog."

DB: ***Let's talk about the good times.***

CJ: Fortunately for all of us at Termite Terrace, we were a product of a certain idiocy in our producers. They didn't know anything about animation except that if they allowed us to have fun making animated cartoons, those cartoons would sell. They didn't care about the end result as long as they had thirty or so each year. They left us alone as long as we delivered, and we did. It was good for them, and creatively great for us.

DB: ***That's not how it is today.***

CJ: No. Think about this. We usually had 3 to 4 directors, 6 to 10 story men, and half a dozen background artists. The four hundred some odd pictures we made came from that system. We didn't have to get anybody's approval, we just went ahead and made films, proving that if you put talented people in a room together, you'll get good stories and good characters. Today, you have to come in with the story first, then try sell it to sixteen-year-olds wearing Armani suits.

DB: ***That sounds right. Of course it's the antithesis of that now. The suits drive the business. Permit me to gush for a moment okay? Your heart and soul has played itself for all of us on the big and small screens for decades. Who cannot be touched by your work in*** **The Grinch,** ***any thoughts?***

CJ: *Charlie Brown* was done the previous year, so I went to the network thinking it was time to do a Dr. Seuss. I didn't know which story it would be, but I had worked with Ted Geisel (Dr. Seuss) during the war and we were friends, so I went to La Jolla where he lived and discussed that we do something creative together. He was a bit reluctant because he had been burned a few times in Hollywood, but we eventually agreed on *The Grinch* story. Anyway, I did almost all of the storyboards with the help of Bob Ogle and a couple of other guys. I think I did almost two thousand drawings, which is fine, I like to work that way and I know you do too.

DB: ***I do. I can't direct from a distance, I have to draw.***

CJ: After it was done, I had to work like hell to sell it. Back then, you had to have a sponsor on a project before a network would accept it. I shopped it around to everybody you can think of, from breakfast foods to chocolates. I gave the presentation over twenty-five times. Finally, an outfit called the Foundation of Commercial Banks bought it, which was surprising since there is a line in the film, "Perhaps Christmas doesn't come from a store." It was odd that a bank was willing to sponsor that. But it worked, and the picture was successful.

DB: ***One last question. Young people today that are going into animation, and there seems to be a lot of them, what advice would you give them?***

CJ: Just as I've said. First of all, learn how to draw. I went to Chouinard Art Institute, which is now Cal Arts. Second, get a well-rounded education. If you look at the animation magazines out now, they are about the mechanics with very little emphasis on writing, acting, or directing. It's important to surround yourself with knowledge.

DB: ***You're right. I see the same dilemma. And I see that my time is up. Chuck, thank you so much.***

CJ: Okay.

DB: ***You're an inspirational man.***

CJ: Call again soon.

Whats Next?

I have had the pleasure of working with Don for six years now, and when he is designing characters, story boarding, or animating, I frequently look over his shoulder. He can bring a drawing to life so easily, it seems, that I often find myself in awe of his tremendous talent. But not only is Don a modern master of animation, he loves to talk through his thought process as draws. I consider myself very lucky to have been witness to his bottomless fount of animation knowledge. I can imagine that any serious animator or student of animation would give his eye-teeth to experience Don at work. Well, you don't have to sacrifice your teeth, but now you can experience Don's vast knowledge and talent for yourself.

No, I didn't suck Don's brains out with a vacuum or anything. But I have convinced him to take his act on the road and pass on some of what is locked up in his head. Imagine yourself, literally standing over Don's shoulder as he draws. No school experience you have will come close to what you can learn from a few hours watching his magic. Whether you already are a professional animator, student, or plan on becoming a computer animator specialist, you will benefit immensely from Don's experience and talent. Our first tour will take us to Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York.

Details of this opportunity and registration info will be printed in forthcoming issues and posted on **www.donbluth.com**. See you soon.

–Jason Ayon

The Seven-Year Slump

The ebb and flow of my life seems to be metered out in seven-year cycles. For example, I am seven years older than Gary Goldman; Gary is seven years older than John Pomeroy, and Morris Sullivan, who enticed our company to Ireland, is twenty-one years older than me. Our company worked in California for seven years before the great exodus to Ireland. Our years in Dublin numbered seven, just before the company went belly-up. Then, the next stop was Fox Animation Studio in Phoenix, which by January 2001, will be exactly seven years. A change is about to happen, it's in the stars. I know this all sounds melodramatic and superstitious, but I'm fast becoming a believer in this nonsense. When I look into the crystal ball, here is what I see.

The animation business continues to plummet into the abyss of inflated wages, over zealous agents, and studio cutbacks. *Anastasia* barely made it into the black, while *Prince of Egypt and Eldorado, City of Gold,* were both box office disappointments. Add to that, the success of *Toy Story I* and *II, Bugs Life, Ants,* and *Dinosaurs,* all of which is convincing producers, directors, and artists, to make wild career leaps into the world of CGI. The gold rush is on. Studios are cutting back on classical animation. In March, Fox Animation downsized. A euphemistic way of saying, they laid off 320 of their artists, leaving sixty nail-biters quaking at their desks, praying that *Titan A.E.* doesn't lay an egg. No sir, the Bluebird isn't singing in Phoenix.

In my book, sixty artists cannot a feature make. That's a skeleton crew. So I ask myself, are we out of business, are we a dinosaur? No, I don't really think so! I've learned how to swim in the tar pits. Metaphorically, that means I'm waiting for my guardian angel, Fred, to Fed-Ex some information about our next move in the movie business. Meanwhile, *ToonTalk*, my present infatuation, takes up fifty percent of my time. The other half goes to a project, which I've been procrastinating for years. That is, animation seminars. Of course, it would be less expensive to do all of this on the World Wide Web, but I have an itch to get more personal, you know, press the flesh, and meet some of you guys face to face.

November of this year has been set aside for **ToonUp 2000**. Starting in Los Angeles, then to Chicago and finally New York. Each semimar will last three days. The brilliant young lion producing our seminars will be Jason Ayon, assistant director on *Anastasia, Bartok,* and *Titan A.E.* For your convenience, we will be taping the sessions. If you cannot attend all of the seminars, the tapes will be available for sale. Each session is limited to 150 seats, and it's first come first served. Can't wait.

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September issue will review

Space Ace

***Plus, more info on the* ToonUp 2000.**